

May 20th, 12:00 AM

Policy Statement of the Library Network at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

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T. J. Tanzer, "Policy Statement of the Library Network at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology."
Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences. Paper 23.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/1977/papers/23>

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POLICY STATEMENT OF THE LIBRARY NETWORK AT THE
SWISS FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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The enclosed policy statement was not created without a lot of difficulty and even today there are many members of the faculty who protest loudly and do not observe the rules. While a statement of policy is not an order it at least permits an overall view of the libraries which fall exactly within the policy's aims and those which do not.

With the creation of the new campus it became obvious that some "fil rouge" had to be found as to construction, exploitation and philosophy of each library and of the network as a whole. It is obvious that each library could not make its own rules and that rules obtaining for a library of 3,000 volumes and a very limited usage could not be translated to a library having a potential holding of some 10,000 volumes with access of a specialized public, while another aspiring to 20,000 volumes would open its doors to students, but restrict their borrowing.

The role of the Central Library was not clear in relation to the peripheral ones. Everyone wanted open stacks everywhere; the loosest possible discipline and strictest order. The user was to be king and the librarian was to be serf. This was the point of view of one faction, the other suggested that the librarian could reign over his kingdom as he wanted, so long as he left them in peace (and if possible gave them books or money) to run their own book collection as they wanted to. Some even went so far as to suggest that the role of the Central Library was to order and catalogue books deposited in the various departments. A "modus vivendi" had to be found before the whole system fell apart or fell prey to different interests.

First one had to explain to the users that libraries and archives are not synonymous. Then one had to convince them that they have a very real role to play in the dynamic process of information gathering and that this process involved storage and costs. And that in this context what mattered were economics. Economics which resulted in economies, which in their turn were governed by the role that each component part of the network played in the whole of it.

Thus the first section was conceived: "Users and their needs". How to satisfy the needs from the point of view of information, i.e. the supports gave rise to the second section. The fourth section defined the material resources and the rules of the game to obtain the information. The third section was inserted when it became apparent that to have the materials and the means of using them could only meaningfully be described in terms of specific objectives.

The layout of the statement, which you have in its original French version, also require some comment. The effort started as an idea to write some rules for the "peripheral libraries" as we called them. This left awful gaps in the descriptions. So the role of the Central Library was added; to distinguish it from the "peripheral library" it was written in another type. Certain comments applied to all libraries. These were written in italics. The "peripheral" and "both" statements are written from the left margin, the "Central" ones only in the right half of the paper.

The policy statement gave rise to a lot of discussion and consultation individually and in committee to allow the best and most suitable practices to be extracted from those currently in use.

The author's moment of greatest satisfaction came when the President of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology suggested writing a covering letter himself, thus giving the policies a lot more weight and impact and at the same time mentioning specific paragraphs which were to come into force at once. They thus received the status of a firm instruction.

T.J. Tanner

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